

Ascanius in tartan

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In 1746 a pamphlet was published anonymously in London. Its title-page declared sensationally that it would reveal the 'A True History, Translated from a Manuscript privately handed about at the Court of Versailles', promising 'A particular Account of all that happened to a certain PERSON during his Wanderings in the North, from his memorable Defeat in April 1746, to his final Escape, on the 19th of September in the same Year.' The title of this pamphlet was *Ascanius: or, The Young Adventurer*. Illustrations show the hero, 'Ascanius', dressed in tartan. But who was this Ascanius? What's in a name? The answers lie in one of the most famous episodes of the long battle of the deposed Stuarts to regain the throne of England.

An adventurous prince

The hero, Ascanius, is Charles Edward Stuart, more popularly known as Bonnie Prince Charlie. He was the eldest son of James Francis Edward Stuart, who was himself the son of the deposed Catholic King James the Second of England and Seventh of Scotland. According to contemporary chroniclers of his life, a new star shining in the night sky at his birth in his father's exiled court in Rome in 1720 marked him as the one who would restore his family's fortunes and regain their lost throne. He attempted to do so in 1745, sailing from France to Scotland with two ships in early July. By mid-September he had gathered an army and taken Edinburgh. In early December, Charles' forces had come as far south as Derby. There was panic in London, but a decision was made to retreat and his campaign was effectively at an end. After months during which the English advanced steadily, and Charles' support crumbled, on April 16 1746 the British forces took only twenty-five minutes to destroy their Jacobite opposition at Culloden, near Inverness. The next day, Charles fled towards the Outer Hebrides. He spent the next six months wandering the western highlands and islands of Scotland seeking a ship to take him back to France.

The *Ascanius* was one of many popular books and pamphlets that appeared in the late 1740s telling the story of Charles' life and his adventures after Culloden. According to the fashion of the time and because the recent rebellion was still a politically sensitive subject, these texts give their hero various pseudonymous masks. Many, like the *Ascanius*, have a classical ring to them. The original edition of *Ascanius* had a large print run, and was highly profitable to its author, a London bookseller and publisher called Ralph Griffiths. Translations appeared in French and Spanish. The *Ascanius* continued to be revised and republished in London, Dublin, Edinburgh and on the continent, and was still being published as late as 1822.

Part of the successful reception of this work lies in its title. Certainly one of its critics thought so. In a pamphlet, titled *The Wanderer; or, Surprising Escape*, the author condemned Griffiths' narrative as inept and unconvincing. Its many defects, he says, make the attention paid to the *Ascanius* by the authorities and the success that it had in a crowded and competitive market almost incomprehensible. He consulted a friend in order to find an explanation for it: they concluded that its title could be the only reason for the *Ascanius*' surprising reception.

What is, then, so special about the title of the *Ascanius*? To readers familiar, as Griffiths' readers certainly would have been, with Virgil's *Aeneid*, the significance attached to the title of his

popular and controversial work is not, perhaps, surprising. The first mention of Aeneas' son Ascanius comes in Jupiter's prophecy of Rome's future greatness in Book One. Reassuring the anxious goddess Venus that Aeneas' mission to found a new city for his dispossessed Trojans will be a success and ensure the future glory of Rome, Jupiter promises, too, that Aeneas' son will succeed him, and will rule for many years in Alba Longa, the first in a long line of Julian kings.

The name game

To mark the certain movement of the Trojans away from their past troubles and towards the power and glory waiting for them in Italy, Jupiter imposes a change of name on the young Trojan prince. Once called Ilus, while Troy stood strong, Ascanius will now, says the god, go by the Romanised name of Iulus. Moreover, the god goes on to promise, the young prince will hand this name down to his Julian descendants, to Caesar and then to Augustus.

Virgil's introduction to Ascanius thus establishes the young prince as a symbol both of certain succession and of the long continuation of a family's rule. And though other versions of the Trojan myth suggested that Ascanius' succession to his father's throne would be opposed by rival claimants, one of whom, his father's son by the Latin princess Lavinia, is mentioned by Virgil later in the *Aeneid*, Ascanius is presented here as a powerful symbol of divinely ordained dynastic succession.

Ascanius was, then, a natural figure to which to turn for comparison when discussing, and complimenting, young royals. Indeed, he appears frequently in Hanoverian propaganda in the first half of the eighteenth century, suggesting a reason why the authorities reacted so particularly strongly to Griffiths' *Ascanius*. In 1718, for example, Laurence Eusden, the poet laureate of the Hanoverian court, celebrated the birth of a royal son, Frederic. Ascanius is mentioned among a number of complimentary parallels between the infant prince and classical heroes:

*So look'd Ascanius, when but yet a Child,
The boasted Pride of Latium once so smil'd,
As 'round his Temples to the wond'ring Sire
In shining Circles play'd the harmless Fire.*

Several other poems comparing the young Frederic to Aeneas' son followed, so that, a few years later, the satirist Jonathan Swift could mock the frequent praise of the Hanoverian prince in Virgilian guise:

*Our eldest Hope, divine Iulus,
(Late, very late, O, may he rule us.)
What early Manhood has he shown,
Before his downy Beard was grown!*

Griffiths' *Ascanius* thus contributes to an ongoing contest between the Stuarts and the Hanoverians, rival claimants to the throne and rival claimants to the image of 'Ascanius'. Presenting Charles as 'Ascanius' in tartan, it recalls the previous use of the eponymous Julian prince in Stuart propaganda, contradicting the claims made for the Hanoverian Frederic. In this way, and at a time when it was a capital offence to print the claim that Charles was the rightful heir to the British crown, the *Ascanius* implies support for the Jacobite message that the Stuarts had a divine right to the contested throne. It is small wonder that the inflam-

matory message encoded in Griffiths' text soon landed him in trouble with Westminster and a speedy trial for sedition.

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